

Does Sex Make Italy Go Around?

Judith Harris (February 27, 2010)



Whereas sociological studies showed that Italians are wonderfully happy with sex, the powerful and privileged are the exception, for they are obliged to resort to paid escorts and/or “masseuses” of one sex or another, sometimes offered as freebies from business associates. Since they are obviously unhappy, they need help...

ROME - [Stefano Benni](#) [2] is one of the funniest men around. In a short story in his book **Bar Sport** (1997) he describes the tubby retired high school professor who spends his days inside a café. From his table the prof examines—literally—the females who come into the bar. As each settles onto a stool, he gives her bum a grade.

No one could be better positioned than Benni, therefore, to examine and grade the sexual goings-on of politicians and their hangers-on that have horrified and titillated Italian news readers, albeit while



making a few men envious.

In the background is a solid sociological analysis of Italian sexual uses and customs, the work of **Marzio Barbagli**, 71, author and sociologist at the [University of Bologna](#) [3], whose books are translated into English. His newest book, written together with fellow sociologists **Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna** of the [University of Padua](#) [4] and **Franco Garelli** from the [University of Turin](#) [5], is **La sessualità degli italiani** ([Il Mulino](#) [6]), and offers the results of some 7,000 interviews on sex with Italians between the ages of 18 and 70.

We already knew it, but one of the

book's chief conclusions is that, although the condition of women in Italy has changed considerably, gender inequality remains more acute in Italy than in other Western countries. A synthesis of Barbagli's investigation results, published in [La Repubblica](#) [7] on February 24, also shows that:

INFIDELITY: Among men, 81% do not accept a partner's betrayal as compared with 89% of women. The lower the educational level achieved, the greater intolerance of infidelity.

NUMBER OF PARTNERS: Ah, the crux. While eschewing infidelity in their partners, a mere 14% of the men say that over a lifetime they have had only one partner, as compared with 50% of the women. Among those admitting to over 20 partners, the male promiscuity rate stands at 12% and the female, just 2%.

ORGASM: An occasion for fibbing. Among men, 83% at least say they achieve this "always" as compared with 34% of the women. Perceptions differ, however. Nine men out of ten believe their partner always achieves orgasm, whereas, when asked, only seven women out of ten say they have.

AGE OF FIRST RELATIONSHIP: For men born around WWI, the age was just under 18, and for women, 22. Today, the age is 17.4 for men—a decline of just a few months in almost a century—and for women, 18.5 years.

VIRGINITY: Four out of a hundred men over age 18 say they have never had a sexual relationship as compared with six women.

Now to Stefano Benni. He makes the point that, whereas the sociological study showed that Italians are wonderfully happy with sex, the powerful and privileged are the exception, for they are obliged to resort to paid escorts and/or "masseuses" of one sex or another, sometimes offered as freebies from business associates.

Since they are obviously unhappy, they need help, says Benni. He therefore proposes they be given courses in flower arranging, divorce action counselling, ballroom dancing lessons and prepping for brilliant conversation. Instead of Viagra and cocaine, they should be taught to prefer lemonade and Nutella. Parties should be arranged for them on the lines of high school proms, to which those taking the cure cannot arrive in limos or private planes.

"Without taking these measures," Benni concludes, "the male example of homo politicus is destined for sterility and extermination. If they remain corruptors and mafiosi, but become chaste and virtuous, you'll see—we'll go on voting for them."

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